WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A polymer article provided with a surface pattern applied to an area of the article that has been formed to a desired shape by deforming the area under pressure so that, when the pressure is removed, the desired shape is produced in the deformed area.

2. A polymer article according to claim 1 wherein the surface pattern is functional.

3. A polymer article according to claim 2 wherein the surface pattern modifies a physical property of the article.

4. A polymer article according to claim 3 wherein the surface pattern modifies at least one of the stress, stiffness, strength or flexibility of the article.

5. A polymer article according to claim 2 wherein the surface pattern provides or includes a visual display of information.

6. A polymer article according to claim 5 wherein the information comprises one or more of indicia.

7. A polymer article according to claim 6 wherein the indicia include one or more of letters, numerals, symbols or pictures.

8. A polymer article according to claim 5 wherein the information identifies the article and/or the manufacturer.

9. A polymer article according to claim 5 wherein information provides instructions for use of the article.

10. A polymer article according to claim 1 wherein the surface pattern is decorative.

11. A polymer article according to claim 1 wherein the surface pattern is applied during the shaping process.

12. A polymer article according to claim 11 wherein the surface pattern is applied with a former having a contact surface adapted to provide the desired surface pattern in the compressed polymer material.

13. A polymer article according to claim 11 wherein the surface pattern is applied to one side of the compressed area and the reverse pattern is formed on the opposite side.

14. A polymer article according to claim 11 wherein surface patterns are applied to both sides of the compressed area.

15. A polymer article according to claim 14 wherein the surface pattern on one side is offset relative to the surface pattern on the other side.

16. A polymer article according to claim 14 wherein the surface pattern one side overlaps the surface pattern on the other side.

17. A polymer article according to claim 14 wherein the surface patterns on each side are the same.

18. A polymer article according to claim 14 wherein the surface patterns on each side are different.

19. A polymer article according to claim 1 wherein the surface pattern is the same colour as the adjacent polymer material.

20. A polymer article according to claim 1 wherein the surface pattern is of a contrasting colour relative to the adjacent polymer material.

21. A polymer article according to claim 1 wherein the surface pattern is raised relative to the adjacent polymer material.

22. A polymer article according to claim 1 wherein the surface pattern is recessed relative to the adjacent polymer material.

23. A polymer article according to claim 1 wherein the article is made of polymeric foam material.

24. A polymer article according to claim 23 wherein the polymeric foam is an open or closed cell polymeric foam that is resiliently compressible and can be deformed under pressure so as to retain the desired shape when the pressure is removed.

25. A polymer article according to claim 23 wherein the polymeric foam has a density in the range of from 20 to 30 $Kg.m^3$.

26. A polymer article according to claim 23 wherein the polymeric foam is selected from the group comprising polyurethane, polyolefin and polyester foam materials.

27. A polymer article according to claim 1 wherein the article is made of polymeric material selected from the group comprising elastomers, thermoplastics and non-woven materials.

28. A polymer article according to claim 1 wherein the article is in the form of an elongate strip.

29. A polymer article according to claim 28 wherein the compressed area extends along the length of the strip.

30. A polymer article according to claim 29 wherein the compressed area is continuous in the longitudinal direction of the strip.

31. A polymer article according to claim 29 wherein the compressed area is discontinuous in the longitudinal direction of the strip.

32. A polymer article according to claim 29 wherein the compressed area has a width transverse to the length of the strip.

33. A polymer article according to claim 1 wherein the compressed area provides the article with desired properties for the intended application of the article.

34. A polymer article according to claim 33 wherein the compressed area forms a hinge portion extending along the length of an elongate strip to be used as a masking material such that an adjacent portion of the strip can hinge relative to the compressed area.

35. A polymer article according to claim 33 wherein the compressed area provides a tab by means of which the article can be gripped to assist handling the article in use.

36. A polymer article according to claim 35 wherein the article is in the form of an elongate strip and the tab is continuous in the longitudinal direction of the strip.

37. A polymer article according to claim 35 wherein the article is in the form of an elongate strip and a series of tabs are provided spaced apart in the longitudinal direction of the strip.

38. A polymer article according to claim 1 wherein the compressed area includes a seam.

39. A polymer article according to claim 38 wherein the article is in the form of an elongate strip and the seam is continuous along the length of the article.

40. A polymer article according to claim 38 wherein the article is in the form of an elongate strip and the seam is discontinuous along the length of the article.

41. A polymer article according to claim 38 wherein adjoining areas are separable along the seam.

42. A polymer article according to claim 38 wherein two or more articles are formed together and releasably secured to each other by a seam allowing the articles to be separated from each other.

43. A polymer article according to claim 38 wherein a tab is provided connected to the article by a seam allowing the tab to be removed after the article has been secured in place.

44. A polymer article according to claim 1 comprising an elongate foam strip for use as a masking material.

45. A method of marking an article of polymer material comprising shaping an area of the article by applying pressure to the polymer material and providing a surface pattern in the shaped area.

46. A method according to claim 45 wherein the surface pattern is formed during the shaping process to compress the polymer material.

47. A method according to claim 45 wherein the surface pattern is inset below the adjacent surface of the compressed area.

48. A method according to claim 45 wherein the surface pattern is raised above the adjacent surface of the compressed area.

49. A method according to claim 45 wherein the surface pattern is produced by a shaping die forming the compressed area.

50. A method according to claim 49 wherein the die is provided with contact surface in which the surface pattern is raised above the contact surface.

51. A method according to claim 49 wherein the die is provided with a contact surface in which the surface pattern is inset below the contact surface.

52. A method according to claim 45 wherein the surface pattern is applied to one side of the compressed area and forms a reverse pattern on the opposite side.

53. A method according to claim 45 wherein the surface pattern is offset relative to a surface pattern applied to the opposite side of the compressed area.

54. A method according to claim 45 wherein the surface pattern overlaps a surface pattern applied to the opposite side of the compressed area.

55. A method according to claim 53 wherein the surface patterns applied to both sides are the same.

56. A method according to claim 53 wherein the surface patterns applied to both sides are different.

57. A method according to claim 45 wherein the shaping process is assisted by an additional input of energy.

58. A method according to claim 57 wherein the additional input of energy is provided by applying a higher pressure.

59. A method according to claim 57 wherein the additional input of energy is provided by applying heat.

60. A method according to claim 57 wherein the additional input of energy is provided by electromagnetic radiation.

61. A method according to claim 57 wherein the additional input of energy is provided by ultrasonics.

62. An apparatus for manufacturing an article of polymer material comprising means for compressing a portion of the article to form an area of reduced thickness, and means for providing a surface pattern in the area.

63. The apparatus according to claim 62 wherein the compression means comprise a former having a contact surface for forming the area of reduced thickness by compressing the polymer material.

64. The apparatus according to claim 62 wherein the surface pattern applying means comprises a portion of the contact surface in which the surface pattern is provided.

65. An elongate foam strip for use as a masking material to mask a gap between two relatively movable parts, the foam strip having an adhesive stripe for releasably securing the foam strip to one of the parts to close temporarily the gap, and a surface pattern provided in an area that has been formed to a desired shape under pressure.